

METHOD FOR PLACING ELECTROSTATIC DISCHARGE CLAMPS WITHIN INTEGRATED CIRCUIT DEVICES

DESCRIPTION

[Para 1] BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[Para 2] 1. Technical Field

[Para 3] The present invention relates to software tools in general, and, in particular, to a method within a software tool for verifying integrated circuit designs. Still more particularly, the present invention relates to a method within a software tool for placing electrostatic discharge clamps in integrated circuit devices.

[Para 4] 2. Description of Related Art

[Para 5] An electrostatic discharge (ESD) event is defined as a transfer of charges between bodies of different electrostatic potentials in proximity or via direct contact. ESD poses a reliability concern for integrated circuit devices. Different models, such as human body model (HBM), machine model (MM) and charged device model (CDM), have been used for testing integrated circuit devices to make sure the integrated circuit devices are adequately protected against an ESD event. The difference among various models mainly lies in the amount of current delivered to an integrated circuit device to emulate an ESD event encountered by the integrated circuit device.

[Para 6] From a circuit design standpoint, ESD clamps are typically utilized to protect an integrated circuit device against an ESD event. An ESD clamp is effectively a large switch that is normally turned off except in the presence of an ESD event. During an ESD event, the switch is turned on to produce a conductive path for charges to be drained into a grounded network within the integrated circuit device.

[Para 7] Generally speaking, it is imperative to minimize the number of ESD clamps placed within an integrated circuit device without compromising ESD protection because the addition of ESD clamps is expensive due to their large sizes and the blockage they cause. As such, the present disclosure targets the problem of placing ESD clamps in an integrated circuit design such that the effective resistance from every ESD-susceptible circuit to the ESD clamps meets the resistance requirements as specified by technology developers.

[Para 8] SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[Para 9] In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention, a region is initially defined within an integrated circuit design. A list of ESD-susceptible circuits located within the defined region is then generated. The center of gravity of the ESD-susceptible circuits located within the defined region is located. Next, an ESD protection device is placed at the center of gravity of the ESD-susceptible circuits located within the defined region. A determination is made as to whether or not all ESD-susceptible circuits within the list of ESD-susceptible circuits are protected by the placement of the ESD protection device. If so, the process is repeated in other regions until the entire integrated circuit is addressed. Otherwise, the defined region is divided into at least two smaller regions and the process is repeated.

[Para 10] All features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent in the following detailed written description.

[Para 11] BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[Para 12] The invention itself, as well as a preferred mode of use, further objects, and advantages thereof, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description of an illustrative embodiment when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[Para 13] Figure 1 illustrates a power network within an integrated circuit design, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

[Para 14] Figure 2 is a high-level logic flow diagram of a method for placing electrostatic discharge clamps within an integrated circuit design, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

[Para 15] Figure 3 is a high-level logic flow diagram of a method for checking electrostatic discharge reliability of an integrated circuit design, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

[Para 16] Figure 4 is a block diagram of a computer system in which a preferred embodiment of the present invention can be implemented.

[Para 17] DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[Para 18] I. Definitions

[Para 19] Power network: A power network is a distribution network comprising metal wires and pads that supplies power from an external power supply through the board, package and chip to individual circuits that operate at a supply voltage. In Figure 1, a power network includes power wires 11 and power pads 12. For simplicity, the package and board portions of the power

network are not shown in Figure 1, but they are similar to the on-chip portion of the power network.

[Para 20] Voltage domain: A voltage domain is a geometric region on a chip that includes a power network connected to the same power supply through a package and a board. All circuits whose power supplies are connected to a power network associated with a voltage domain are assumed to belong to that voltage domain. The entire region of Figure 1 represents one voltage domain.

[Para 21] Circuit: A placeable object that provides a logical or arithmetic function. A circuit may be composed of a single primitive.

[Para 22] Macro: A large placeable object composed of a number of circuits that provides a logical or arithmetic function.

[Para 23] I/O circuit: An I/O circuit acts as an interface between the logic functions on a chip and various external devices. In Figure 1, several I/O circuits, such as IO0, IO1, IO2 and IO3, are shown. The power connections from a group of I/O circuits to the same power network imply that the group of I/O circuits belongs to the same voltage domain.

[Para 24] Region: A region is a geometric area on a chip where all I/O circuits in that region are handled by the algorithm independently of the I/O circuits in any other region. One voltage domain may include one or more regions.

[Para 25] ESD-susceptible circuit: An ESD susceptible circuit is any circuit that has a direct connection to external pads through which excess charges due to an ESD event can be imparted onto the chip.

[Para 26] ESD clamp: An ESD clamp is a circuit used to protect an integrated circuit device against an ESD event. An ESD clamp is essentially a large switch that turns on in the presence of excess static charges to provide an electrical path for the static charges to ground. In Figure 1, several ESD clamps, such as ESD0, ESD1 and ESD2, are shown. Similar to the I/O circuits, the power connections from the ESD clamps are connected to a power network.

[Para 27] Extraction: The process of generating a power network from design data. With design data stored as GDS, the extraction process can be quite long for large designs. With design data stored as rectangles and/or centerlines with fattening, the computer run time and memory requirements are greatly reduced. A preferred approach is to use design data stored as rectangles and/or centerlines with fattening.

[Para 28] Power routing: Process of connecting I/O circuits, ESD clamps, and other circuits such as ESD-susceptible circuits to a power network with robust power buses.

[Para 29] Blockage: Blockage refers to an area on a chip where circuits cannot be placed or power routes cannot be routed, which typically occurs when there are other circuits already placed in that area. Two blockage areas 14 are shown in Figure 1.

[Para 30] Power node: A power node is defined as a node generated by an intersection of the power route from an I/O circuit or ESD clamp to a power network. In Figure 1, power nodes corresponding to all the I/O circuits and ESD clamps are shown as N0, N1, ... N6.

[Para 31] Power resistance: A power resistance at an I/O circuit is the resistance of the power wires from that I/O circuit to ESD clamps. This is computed by placing an ESD clamp at every I/O power node, extracting the power network, assigning a current source at the location of the I/O circuit, assigning a voltage source at each ESD clamp, and simulating the network to compute the voltage drop at the I/O circuit. The ratio of the voltage drop to the current source is defined as the power resistance of that I/O circuit.

[Para 32] II. Assumptions

[Para 33] The methods of the present invention are preferably applicable to area-array (also known as flip-chip) integrated circuit designs. The starting point for the methods of the present invention is a chip having a floor-planned design in which large macros have been placed. The floor-planned design also includes a list of assigned and placed I/O circuits as well as a list of ESD-susceptible circuits.

[Para 34] For each voltage domain on a chip, both I/O circuits and ESD clamps are power-routed to the same power network. Such assumption follows from the fact that power gets supplied to the I/O circuits in the region of interest using the same power network. So in order to avoid any area and wiring impacts, the ESD clamps are power-routed to the same power network.

[Para 35] Since both I/O circuits and ESD clamps are power routed to the same power network, placing an ESD clamp close to an I/O circuit implies placing the ESD clamp close to the power node corresponding to the I/O circuit.

[Para 36] Vias, which are used to connect overlapping metal wires of same polarity on adjacent layers, are included in the analysis because their resistance may be significant. This is particularly important for achieving

accurate results with the analysis tool that is based on the extraction and simulation of the entire power network.

[Para 37] III. ESD Clamp Placing Algorithm

[Para 38] With reference now to Figure 2, there is depicted a high-level logic flow diagram of a method for placing ESD clamps, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The starting point for the method is a floor-planned chip having I/O circuits and large macros (including ESD-susceptible circuits) placed and fixed, as shown in block 20. Then, a region is established for each voltage domain, as depicted in block 21. Next, for every region, a determination is made as to whether or not any I/O circuit in that region is unprotectable, as shown in block 22. An unprotectable I/O circuit is an I/O circuit that cannot satisfy ESD requirements under any legal placement of ESD clamps. By computing the power resistance of every I/O circuit and checking if it is larger than a predetermined DC resistance limit, it is determined whether that I/O circuit is unprotectable or not. This means that there is no legal placement of ESD clamps that can satisfy the ESD protection requirements at that I/O circuit. The step in block 22 screens out problems early on before attempting any ESD clamp placement.

[Para 39] If an unprotectable I/O circuit is detected, the unprotectable I/O circuit is reported to a designer so that the designer can fix the floorplan by modifying the placement of the I/O circuit, as shown in block 23. Otherwise, if no unprotectable I/O circuit is detected, a list of I/O circuits is generated in that region, as depicted in block 24.

[Para 40] For each region, R_a , a preferred location to add an ESD clamp is determined, as shown in block 25. The preferred location can be, for example, the center of gravity, G_a , of all the I/O circuits in the region. The coordinates for the center of gravity, G_a , of the region can be computed as follows:

[Para 41]

$$x_{G_a} = \frac{\sum_{j \in IOList_a} R_j x_j}{\sum_{j \in IOList_a} R_j}$$

[Para 42]

$$y_{G_a} = \frac{\sum_{j \in IOList_a} R_j y_j}{\sum_{j \in IOList_a} R_j}$$

[Para 43] where R_j is the power resistance of the j^{th} I/O circuit. Coordinates (x_j, y_j) are the coordinates of the j^{th} I/O circuit, or equivalently, the coordinates of the power node N_j associated with the j^{th} I/O circuit. The above-mentioned formulae attempt to find the location closest to all the I/O circuits while considering their resistance values. Thus, the location of the center of gravity will be closer to the high resistance I/O circuits and farther from the low resistance I/O circuits.

[Para 44] Next, an ESD clamp, ESD_i , is placed at the preferred location determined in block 25, as shown in block 28. In addition, the placement of the clamp, ESD_i , is legalized; that is, the physical requirements for placing the ESD clamp such as snapping to a grid and avoiding blockage are satisfied. Furthermore, the newly placed ESD clamp is power routed, which essentially provides power wires to connect the ESD clamp to the power network, as shown in block 28.

[Para 45] A determination is made as to whether or not all I/O circuits within the region, after the placement of the ESD clamp, meet the ESD requirements, as depicted in block 29. The detail of such determination is

further described in Figure 3. If any of the I/O circuits, after the placement of the ESD clamp, does not meet the ESD requirement, then the ESD clamp is removed from the region and the region is subdivided into two regions (first horizontally and then vertically or vice versa), as depicted in block 27. The I/O circuits within each of the two new regions are further considered by returning to block 24. If, on the other hand, all of the I/O circuits meet the ESD requirements after the placement of the ESD clamp, then a set, $ESDIO_i$, is generated consisting of all the I/O circuits within the region, as shown in block 30. The process returns to block 24 for a new region until all I/O circuits in all regions meet the ESD requirements.

[Para 46] After all the ESD clamps have been placed, the redundant ESD clamps are removed, as depicted in block 51. The purpose of this step is to minimize the number of ESD clamps by removing any ESD clamps that are not really needed. To do so, the ESD clamps are ranked in reverse order in terms of the I/O circuits they satisfy. Such information is available via the $ESDIO_i$ lists that are generated throughout the method. Then, each ESD clamp is removed from the list one at a time, and a simulation is performed. If any I/O circuit fails the ESD robustness check, as outlined in Figure 3, after the removal of an ESD clamp; that means the removed ESD clamp is required. If not, then that ESD clamp can be safely removed.

[Para 47] IV. ESD Clamp Checking Algorithm

[Para 48] Referring now to Figure 3, there is depicted a high-level logic flow diagram of a method for checking whether or not an I/O circuit meets a predetermined ESD requirement, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The layout of a chip is analyzed and the power network is extracted, as shown in block 31. The power distribution network of the chip is modelled as a resistive network, as depicted in block 32. For example, the resistances of all the wire segments are calculated and a resistive network model of the power distribution network is then generated. The ESD

clamps for the power network are identified, and each of the identified ESD clamps is modeled as a voltage source connected in series with a resistor, as shown in block 33. For example, the associated voltage and resistance values for each ESD clamp are extracted from simulated or measured I-V curves for that ESD clamp. Then, a linearized current-voltage model having a voltage source connected in series with a resistor is inserted into the resistive network at each point where an ESD clamp is placed.

[Para 49] Next, the I/O circuits (and other ESD-susceptible circuits) are identified. An ESD event is modeled as a current source at the locations of the I/O circuits, as depicted in block 34. For example, a current corresponding to the peak current for the CDM design target (e.g., 10 A) is applied to the I/O circuit power pin (i.e., the connection of the I/O circuit to the I/O power route).

[Para 50] The ESD calculations are performed by simulating the extracted linear network for each I/O circuit, one at a time, as shown in block 35. For example, the IR drop through the power network, including the resistance and voltage drop of all the ESD clamps on the power network, is calculated. Note that the parallel paths of current through the power planes are also included in the ESD calculations.

[Para 51] The computed voltage at each I/O circuit power pin is compared to a predetermined voltage threshold, as depicted in block 36. The predetermined voltage threshold is preferably defined by technology developers. If the computed voltage at an I/O circuit power pin exceeds the predetermined voltage threshold, then that I/O circuit is considered as failing the ESD robustness check and will be reported, as shown in block 37. If the computed voltage at an I/O circuit power pin does not exceed the predetermined voltage threshold, then that I/O circuit is considered as passing the ESD robustness check, as depicted in block 38.

[Para 52] As has been described, the present invention provides a method within a software tool for placing ESD clamps in integrated circuit devices. The placement algorithm of the present invention is driven by the analysis results obtained from the extraction and simulation of the power distribution networks. The method of the present invention guarantees an ESD clamp placement that satisfies ESD robustness requirements.

[Para 53] Although I/O circuits are used to illustrate the present invention, it is understood by those skilled in the art that the method of the present invention is applicable to all ESD susceptible circuits.

[Para 54] With reference now to Figure 4, there is depicted a block diagram of a computer system in which a preferred embodiment of the present invention can be implemented. As shown, a computer system 40 includes a main processor 41 coupled to a main memory 42 and a multiple-function I/O processor (MFIO) 43. Main processor 41 may include a single processor or multiple processors. Several peripheral storage devices, such as a diskette drive 46, a tape drive 47, and a direct access storage devices (DASDs) 48, are controlled by MFIO 43. In addition, MFIO 43 provides communications to other devices via communication ports such as COMM 1 and COMM 2.

[Para 55] A workstation controller 44 is coupled to a communications I/O processor (CIOP) 45 via a system bus 49. Workstation controller 44 provides communications between main processor 41 and workstations 50 that may be connected to computer system 40. CIOP 45 provides communications to other devices via communication ports such as COMM3, COMM4, and COMM5.

[Para 56] Although the present invention has been described in the context of a fully functional computer system, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the mechanisms of the present invention are capable of being

distributed as a program product in a variety of forms, and that the present invention applies equally regardless of the particular type of signal bearing media utilized to actually carry out the distribution. Examples of signal bearing media include, without limitation, recordable type media such as floppy disks or CD ROMs and transmission type media such as analog or digital communications links.

[Para 57] While the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.